

Panel is pushing pipeline safety

A Democratic candidate for the Arizona Corporation Commission, who is running against my colleagues, recently assailed the ACC for failing to persuade the federal government to allow the state to do more in the area of pipeline safety ("Pipelines require stricter inspection," Letter, May 15).

Unfortunately, this individual appears more interested in political grandstanding than in the facts.

My fellow commissioners and I have been aggressively pushing the federal government to allow Arizona's Office of Pipeline Safety, which acts as an agent of the federal OPS, to do what is necessary to protect our pipelines.

Since the July 2003 Kinder Morgan pipeline rupture in Tucson, we have made progress. In October of last year, ACC Chairman Marc Spitzer, on behalf of the commission, testified before the Senate Commerce Committee. This committee, chaired by Sen. John McCain, was investigating the pipeline rupture and requested that the ACC participate in this process. Spitzer presented possible solutions to encroachment issues and discussed the relationship between the ACC and OPS.

More recently, Commissioner Bill Mundell and I persuaded OPS to allow us to conduct an independent metallurgical test on what caused the rupture. Previously, OPS planned to allow the pipeline company to do the only test.

Moreover, after learning that OPS intended to cut back the number of days we are allowed to inspect the pipeline from 10 to three, I wrote a letter calling on OPS to reverse its decision. A dialogue has now developed between the ACC and OPS on this issue and we hope to announce a resolution soon.

Finally, we continue to urge OPS to issue meaningful fines against pipeline companies when they violate the law.

Pipeline safety is a serious and ongoing issue for our state, and it deserves an accurate and levelheaded debate.

— Kris Mayes, Phoenix

The writer is an Arizona Corporation Commission member.